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ADJUSTMENT OF RURAL YOUTH TO URBAN ENVIRONMENTS.

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OUR POPULATION HAS BEEN SHIFTING FROM RURAL TO URBAN CENTERS FOR SEVENTY YEARS, REFLECTED BY THE FACT THAT IN 1900, 78 PERCENT OF THE POPULATION LIVED IN RURAL AREAS, IN CONTRAST TO 33 PERCENT IN 1960. THESE STATISTICS REVEAL THAT ALL PEOPLE, AND ESPECIALLY RURAL YOUTH, MUST LEARN TO LIVE IN A CHANGING URBAN ENVIRONMENT. IT IS A MISTAKE TO STEREOTYPE THESE YOUTH AS ONE SINGLE GROUP, WITHOUT REALIZING THAT THEY COME FROM A VARIETY OF SUB-CULTURES, WITH DIFFERENT SYSTEMS OF VALUES, AND WITH DIFFERENT WAYS OF COPING WITH SITUATIONS, INCLUDING THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT. OUR PRESENT EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES AND SOCIAL SERVICES ARE NOT ADEQUATE TO HELP YOUTH MAKE THE ADJUSTMENT FROM RURAL TO URBAN LIVING. SOME OF THE CHANGES WHICH SCHOOLS, YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS, AND OTHER SERVICES NEED TO CONSIDER INCLUDE--(1) SOCIAL SERVICES NEED TO BE FAMILY-FOCUSED, (2) RURAL YOUTH SHOULD BE MADE TO FEEL WELCOME AND SHOULD ALSO BE TAUGHT IN SMALL CLASSES, (3) A FUNCTIONAL CURRICULUM WITH EXCELLENT TEACHERS IS NEEDED, (4) SCHOOLS AND CHURCHES MUST REVERT TO THEIR OLD FUNCTION OF BEING THE CENTER OF NEIGHBORHOOD LIFE, AND (5) INCREASED JOB OPPORTUNITIES MUST BE PROVIDED. THIS SPEECH WAS PRESENTED AT THE NATIONAL OUTLOOK CONFERENCE ON RURAL YOUTH, OCTOBER 23-26, 1967, WASHINGTON, D.C., SPONSORED JOINTLY BY THE U.S. DEPARTMENTS OF AGRICULTURE, HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE, INTERIOR, AND LABOR, OEO, AND THE PRESIDENT'S COUNCIL ON YOUTH OPPORTUNITY. (ES)

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ADJUSTMENT OF RURAL YOUTH TO URBAN ENVIRONMENTS

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I am an urban planner working from a social work base -- the older I become, the less sure I am of my own expertise or my ability to give answers to the complex problems suggested by the title for this session. The greater part of my working life has been focused on the problem of adolescent development in the urban environment...and twenty years later my conclusion is, that in each decade, in every year, "the society" -- adults, parents and children, occupying a specific geographic area, rural or urban, must work at discovering and rediscovering the rites of passage which helps youth move from and through dependence to an increasing degree of independence. There are no definitive answers, but solutions emerge while we are working towards answers. For example, in Chicago while we were working on the ways to prevent and control juvenile delinquents in gangs, the gang groups grew up, threw away their dependence on gangs, and the new adolescents became dependent on drugs, and presented a new problem. There will always be universal needs, but with different manifestations.

To throw in as an explanation of the problem of adjustment in cliche that we are living in a changing world is not sufficient. We must accept the truism that our entire society is influx. We are all part of the broader picture of social change in all areas. This leads me to the first point I would like to make -- We cannot focus on the changes required of youth, rural or urban alone, but on the need for all people who live in families, to swing with a changing, influx, urban environment! All people, and especially rural youth, must learn to make it in a changing urban environment, or our nation will be the weaker.

The statistical facts of the movement of people from rural areas to metropolitan population centers, have been and will be repeated by each of your guests at this conference. Since I've become a conformist, in my middle years, let me join them. It is a fact that more and more Americans are and will be living in less and less space, crowding ourselves into larger and larger metropolitan areas. While in 1900, 78 percent of the population lived in rural areas, as of 1960 only 33 percent lived in rural farm areas. This trend is expected to continue. Estimates indicate that by 1980 only 29 percent of our population will live in rural areas. Thirty percent will live in central cities and the suburbs will

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continue to grow providing housing for 41 percent of the increasing population. From 1940 to 1960, 17.4 million people left the farm population for the urban centers, leaving only 15 million in farming.* Of this group there are approximately one-half million children under 18 who live in migratory farm workers families...which means, at best, interrupted schooling; at worst, no schooling and the development of a potential sick, low-income, under-educated population. While the war on poverty continues (and in Vietnam), we are raising replacements in the poverty society.

The rural youth who move to the urban centers come, in the main, from those families who have enough strength and mobility to try to improve their living conditions, want better job and educational opportunities. They are families who want to share in some concrete fashion, in the growing affluence and expectations which the radio, TV, magazines, newspapers describe is a right of all Americans. They come from the Navajo reservations, from the deep South, from Puerto Rican farms, from the scratch farm lands and worn out coal mines of West Virginia and the Appalachian areas.

My second point is that it is a mistake to attempt to describe "rural youth" in one big false stereotype, but we should understand that we are talking about young people who come from a variety of sub-cultures, with different systems of values, cultural heritage, ways of coping with situations including the urban environment. For example, Navajo youths must give up their tribal customs of non-competitiveness and their religious beliefs, if they are truly going to make it in the cities of Albuquerque, Gallup, or Chicago.

A true story which illustrates my own stereotype thinking may make a number of points. A number of years ago, as a representatave of the National Federation of Settlements, I was responsible for helping a community develop the human services for their new town in Georgia. This city was the result of "the Korean police action war." On land which was formerly used as a peanut farm, a city of 20,000 population developed overnight. Rural families from fifty miles around were drawn to Warner-Robins, Georgia, by the haunting possibility of a "cash crop" -- money which was hard to come by in farming. Most of the families which settled in this city, after a period of ten years, were still talking about "going home," even though most of them were destined to stay there the rest of their natural life, and were even purchasing lots in the local cemetery. I have no doubt that this belief had much to do with "their adjustment," to Warner-Robins. How much do you invest of yourself in a situation which your family believes is temporary? Is the very nature of the adjustment different? With rural families which tend to exert stronger controls over its members, the adolescent has this additional dilemma -- do I send out shallow roots or do I dig in?"

After spending about six months in the community, and with a hot summer approaching, we sophisticated city planners began to plan a resident

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* Our People and Their Cities, Chart Book, Urban American, Inc.

camping program for the children in the community. We knew camping, and even understood that we had to keep the camp fee to a nominal one. We set up a camping service of which we were proud with a 4-H camp group. As we came closer to the opening of camp, we became increasingly concerned because no one was registering. In desperation we met with the overly polite adults to discuss this problem. They explained that our description of camp and its activities were of no interest to the potential campers--they knew how to get along in the out-of-doors -- what they were interested in was a trip program to the larger city, Macon, where they could ride the newly installed escalator and see what was going on where the action was! We were embarrassed, but when we cancelled summer camp and substituted summer city trips, we had a fully-registered program.

The rediscovery that programs intended to serve people must be relevant, of interest and have some kind of pay-off to the user, is the critical input of the current anti-poverty programs, and is the essence of the state of flux in the urban environment. The urban environment to which rural youth must adjust is the same chaos that their family must learn to ride or be thrown into apathy or a panic.

The city -- the big central city is a chaotic package of several social systems which do not work, and a physical plant which wore itself out during the depression and it has never been rehabilitated. This depressing situation has been aggravated by the increasing numbers who make demands on both the physical and social systems of the urban center. All these systems from housing, employment to education and welfare are now being challenged and are being forced to change and become relevant to citizens need. They are all in a state of flux, if not panic, as they are being challenged to respond to new problems in different ways.

This week I was talking to a neighbor who teaches elementary schools, and has a high proportion of Puerto Rican children in her class. In their out-of-classroom discussions she was surprised how much they romanticized what it was like back home. They described what in actuality had been stark poverty, warm in terms of friends, relatives, "what we used to do to have fun" in contrast to New York which was ugly, unfriendly, cold, different and strange. These families, the adults and the young children living in New York and not knowing how to participate in it, were looking homeward -- looking backward. The adolescent group, like all immigrant youth before them are trying desperately to cut loose and make it American, while their only real security rests in the old ways which they have to reject.

With all of the influx of people into the city since 1901, a formal system for bringing people into the city, if it ever existed, does not exist today. The informal system of "The Human Life Line" forged by European immigrants when the earner came and gradually brought over his family and kinfolk exists for some. But for many, if not most, coming to

the urban center is like learning to swim by being dropped into water over one's head. They get completely (swamped) covered by the water, and have to struggle to survive. The rural family and rural youth unless they are being relocated from an Indian Reservation, or are following a migratory path established by kinfolk or friends come into a hostile environment completely unequipped to manage it. It is rare that the migrant family would have had the opportunity or taken advantage of the opportunity to learn the skills or acquire the education which are demanded in the urban settlement. Few families have the resources to pay for their living expenses while acquiring the necessary skills to earn their "cost of existing." The first adjustment for the head of the household is to find dead-end work which no one wants to do - or try to become eligible for public assistance. The result of this adjustment on the children in the families, is to underline the fact that they must be children of second-class citizens. And if they are school-age youth, even if they didn't have an inferior or different education, they would be facing at their level a fear-ridden situation. Few of us have considered the fear there is in the schools. John Holt, in a book called "How Children Fail" writes, "The subtler signs of fear escape us. Most children in schools are scared most of the time. The adjustments children make to their fears are almost wholly bad, destructive of their intelligence and capacity. The scared fighter may be the best fighter, but the scared learner is always a poor learner." *

Rural youth, in or out of a family who faces a new, strange, different living arrangement in the slums of our urban center, in a worn out school facility, with a minimum of social support from social agencies and churches have to be supermen and superwomen to make it. This adjustment cannot be made by the person on his own with his limited resources.

Since youth in our society is in "education," it is the school system through which we make our major public investment in youth; it is impossible to avoid focusing on the changes the educational system and its supportive agencies must make to provide the supports to adjustment in the city. I have listed a number of items which schools, youth organizations, and other services need to consider.

1. The educational system and the schools, its supportive social services need to be family-focused and not exclusively child-oriented.

2. Preparation for education which should include youth and their families should be available to all...and its first element is reducing the fear and anxiety which the authoritative agencies like schools, engender.

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* How Children Fail. John Holt. Delta Book, 1965.

3. Neither rural youth or urban youth can be taught in large classes, or given guidance and support in large groups. Massive problems of all kinds need to be decentralized so they are of human scale.

4. Teachers, the old and the new, are not prepared or kept current with the learning needs of the low-income, migrant family. They need to become participants in neighborhood activity, they need to include home visiting in their duties. Only the most creative teachers can teach in the central city. This is equally true of home economists, social workers, preachers, etc.

5. The families who come to the city need a functional curriculum, not pseudo education -- functional services, not the illusion of services. They need to be helped to survive, how to make it in their community, before they become defeated, broken as a family, reduced in size as people! They need to be equipped to manage concerns growing out of the community and neighborhood events.

6. Intelligence testing, vocational guidance, current system of grading should be made relevant to the situation as it is or thrown out. They are neither helpful or useful as currently used.

7. Parents and their children have to be involved and should participate in the educational tasks to be undertaken. Parents need "help, not punishment" in providing real support to their children. The ability to make decisions and solve problems, the ability to choose between alternatives is the critical element in learning, not in storing of information. Education is primarily the exercise of the intellect, not the squirreling of nuts of knowledge content alone.

8. Schools and churches must revert to their old function of being the center of neighborhood life. They must be available, attractive and used by the community on a seven-day basis for as many hours as is needed. Cultural activities and community service must be central to the development of the adjusted urbanist. Rural people can bring a heritage of cultural activities and folklore to enrich the urban setting.

9. Jobs and the opportunity to earn a dollar must be provided if the rural family is going to be able to participate even in the best designed programs to improve the urban environment. In our society youth needs purchasing power of his own. Manpower programs must be linked to the public education system to accomplish this objective. Where employment cannot provide income supports, it is the responsibility of government to provide a basic level of support as a right, and not as charity.

10. The educational system and its teachers, social service practitioners all must recognize that they cannot work alone, but are part of an army of technicians and professionals whose skill and energy must be harnessed and focused if we are going to make a difference. In public welfare and public social services, I believe we have learned this old lesson -- that, "No man or profession is an island!"

These suggested changes might make a little difference today in the adjustment of rural youth to the central city. By tomorrow, we may have to do much more if people are not going to be considered as our country's most expendable item!